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Her Offering

Woman's Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church

156 Fifth Avenue, New York

Her Offering.

The lock was out of order, so it was a long, cold minute before the door could be opened. Even though she lived in one room and a closet, Miss Randilla Banks felt a glad sense of home-coming every time she conquered that unruly lock.

She lit her lamp and looked about her. On the floor lay an envelope that somebody had slipped under the door. Miss Banks picked it up and tried to guess what it contained before she lit her oil stove and put her supper on to cook. How frugal was that supper they can guess who, after a hard day's work, have cooked lonely suppers over an oil stove.

Miss Banks sat down to wait for the cooking and examined the envelope. It contained a stirring appeal for the cause of home missions, and a statement that the treasury was empty. Also a little envelope to hold Miss Banks' thank offering to be given in at the Praise meeting on Sunday night. It was then Saturday evening.

Miss Banks was a seamstress; but for the last three years repeated attacks of rheumatism and grip had left her little strength for work. The last sick spell had eaten up her small bank account; now she lived from hand to mouth. She was a tall, spare woman, with old age thinning and whitening her hair. Some people made unkind remarks about her homely appearance.

Yes, my heroine was poor and homely and old; but to Him who looketh on the heart she was rich, beautiful, and immortal. Poor and homely

and old; yet her taste in *giving* was royal. She would like to pour gold into the Lord's treasury; she would delight to heap diamonds and rubies at the feet of Him who had been her stay and comfort through long years of poverty and sorrow.

After supper Miss Banks laid her week's earnings on the table. The money was in small change; one-tenth of it she put by itself as the Lord's share—it would just pay her pew rent. No thank offering could come out of that. The remainder she separated into little piles; so much for room rent, so much for coal, and the rest for food. A very small amount of food would it purchase; but Miss Banks knew to a cent's worth how much food she would be *obliged* to eat during the coming week. From her food money she took a bright dime. Could she give that?

As she asked herself the question she heard an ominous click! and a long crack went half way down the lamp chimney. It might last another week, but likely not. Then she must have a bar of soap; she had forgotten that. No, Randilla Banks could not afford even a ten cent thank offering. Neither could she afford strength for a "good cry," though five or six tears did roll down her sallow cheeks, for she knew about the importance of home mission work, and sighed as she thought of the empty treasury; but what could she do to help the work of her beloved church?

Nothing apparently, nothing but to go to her Bible, to *her* chapter, the fifty-fourth of Isaiah.

How Miss Banks wished that the words "old maid" might have been put in the Bible, at least once! There was plenty of comfort for widows, she thought, but that did not belong to her. So she hunted for promises for the desolate and solitary.

Then this solitary soul turned to the Psalms in search of something suited to one who was too poor to give even a dime thank offering.

"Cast thy burden on the Lord and He shall sustain thee"—and sustain even the burden of His work, she thought: "Thou tellest my wanderings; put Thou my tears into Thy bottle; are they not in Thy book?" One of Miss Banks' tears had fallen on the thank offering envelope. There it lay, a little damp spot just where she would have been glad to write $10. Would God accept that salty tear for a thank offering? Then Miss Banks thought of the "golden vials full of odors which are the prayers of the saints." Like a whisper from the Holy Spirit came the words: "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egpyt, and have heard their cry: for I know their sorrows. And I am come down to deliver them."

Surely God might do something to deliver His Church in answer to her "cry." Unmindful of her rheumatism she got down on her knees, and I wish the other eight hundred and fifty-five thousand members of the Presbyterian church in America could have heard her prayer.

That Saturday evening, in another house, on another street, in a cosy room sat another woman, alone. She, too, held in her hand a thank offering envelope, the counterpart of the one Miss Banks had found awaiting her. It was still empty, though the other hand held an open pocketbook, whose contents had evidently just been examined, and consisted of two silver quarters and a dime, beside two twenty dollar bills.

"I must remember to ask Fred for a dollar or two. Of course, I suppose I could put in this change and let it go at that, but I shouldn't like any one to know that I had given so little.

"I know just what I shall do with these two bills," mused their complacent owner, as she spread them out in her lap. "This one will buy me a new fall jacket—the new style is so handsome, it is sure to be ever so much more becoming

to me than the one I bought last fall. Dear me, what a shame that fashions change so often! I really never wore that jacket a dozen times; but I do like to have my clothes modern.

"That other bill," continued the speaker, soliloquizing, "will buy the hat I admired at Madame Dupré's opening. I know I have always said that it was a shame to put so much money into a hat, but that is a beauty, and I mean to indulge for this once."

So saying, the envelope and money were slipped together into this fortunate woman's purse and the whole matter forgotten as a telegram came, saying, "Fred" had been called out of the city and would not be home before Monday. As she made ready for church the next evening, she suddenly bethought herself of the thank offering, and with a half-guilty flush of mortification that her offering was to be so little, she hastily placed the silver pieces in the envelope and sealed the end, slipping both into her pocketbook with the comforting thought: "Oh, well! no one will know the difference, for there is no way of identifying the gifts as no names are used. I forgot to select a text; but never mind, it will have to go as it is. Its rather a shabby gift for a thank offering I am afraid, but I'll make it up next time."

It had been decided by those having the matter in charge that the collection should be taken up from one aisle at a time, and that after the envelopes thus gathered had been opened, the texts read, and the money put in the receptacle awaiting it, there should be a hymn and responsive reading while the envelopes from contributors in the next aisle were being gathered.

Miss Banks sat in the second aisle—there were but three—and it chanced that her envelope was the last to be opened of those gathered in that section. The minister opened it to find it quite empty save for a bit of paper, from which he read: "It

grieved me to think that no coin of mine could be counted among other offerings to-night, and I was tempted to bitterness of soul because of this, when the thought came that I could make an offering of prayer. Falling upon my knees I asked that it might be the happy privilege of some one else to make a double offering, because to me has been denied the privilege to give at all. That I might not dishonor God by unworthy doubts that He would answer my prayer, I have chosen for my text, 'O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt.'"

There was a little silence after the pastor sat down; many who had given even liberally remembered suddenly that there had been no odor of prayer about their gift. It was but a moment that the silence lasted, but it was long enough for the arrow of conviction, shot from a shaft in God's own hand, to pierce the heart of one who sat at the end of the aisle down which the collectors were now coming. With fingers trembling with eagerness she tore open the end of an envelope she held in her hand, shook out the dime and two quarters which it held, and tucked in their place two twenty dollar bills, while she hastily penciled the words, "To go with the envelope which held the prayer, if God will accept it from one who was selfishly tempted to give a few coins of little value instead." None in the congregation knew who had made the offering, but, as the pastor unrolled the bills and read the lines that accompanied them, and then with tender emotion asked for a blessing on the two who had thus made a special heart offering, tears stood in the eyes of more than one, but into two hearts had stolen the peace which God grants to those who seek to do His will.—From *Home Mission Monthly*.

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